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Govt finally calls inaugural NFC session on Dec 4

• Aurangzeb-led commission to chart strategy, form sub-groups for new award • Provinces, Centre to give 10-minute briefings on fiscal positions • Terms of reference cover distribution of five key federal tax categories • Commission to debate cost-sharing for provincial, national, transnational projects • PM expected to engage with leadership of key allies before formal sitting

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: After yet another rescheduling, the federal government has convened the inaugural meeting of the 11th National Finance Commission (NFC) on Dec 4 to set the housekeeping framework for subsequent technical, financial and legal discussions on horizontal and vertical resource sharing among the federating units.

According to notices sent to the provinces, the first NFC meeting, to be presided over by Federal Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, will take up three agenda items. It will begin with general discussions on "strategy for deliberations on the 11th NFC award, including proposed formation of sub-groups for deliberations on thematic areas, etc".

This will be followed by 10-minute presentations each by the four provincial governments and the Ministry of Finance on their respective fiscal positions. The commission will finally set the schedule and timelines for future NFC meetings, most likely to be held in all federal and provincial capitals, until the conclusion of its deliberations.

Sources told *Dawn* that the finance ministry had earlier issued notices to the provinces for the first meeting on Dec 3 along with the agenda, but the date was changed the same day to Dec 4.

The 11th NFC was constituted on Aug 22 to finalise a new award for sharing federal divisible resources between the Centre and the provinces.

The first meeting was originally scheduled for Aug 27, then delayed to Aug 29 for unspecified reasons. This, too, was postponed on the request of the Sindh government due to flood-related engagements. The session was later rescheduled for Nov 17, then Nov 18, and again deferred at the desire of the Prime Minister's Office.

Headed by Finance Minister Aurangzeb, the NFC comprises the four provincial finance ministers and four non-statutory members, one from each province.

The terms of reference set out in Clause 2 of Article 160 require the commission to recommend the distribution of the net proceeds from five major tax categories between the federation and the provinces. These include taxes on income, including capital value tax and corporation tax, but excluding taxes on income consisting of remuneration paid out of the Federal Consolidated Fund.

Also on the list are taxes on the sale and purchase of goods imported, exported, produced, manufactured, or consumed; export duties on cotton and such other export duties as may be specified by the president; excise duties; and any other taxes as may be specified by the president.

The notification also seeks to make recommendations on grants-in-aid by the federal government to the provinces.

The new NFC is also required to deliberate issues relating to the sharing of financial expense incurred or to be incurred by the federation in respect of subjects falling within the provincial

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ISLAMABAD: Leaders of the Tehreek-i-Tahaffuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan protest against the 27th Amendment and other government measures outside Shah Faisal Mosque on Friday.—Mohammad Asim/White Star

Opposition protests 'state oppression', fresh tweaks

• Stages countrywide demonstrations, lashes out at 27th Amendment, cybercrime laws • Leaders say changes shield the 'powerful', tighten establishment grip • Brand govt 'oppressors and usurpers' • Describe immunity clause as un-Islamic, against local traditions

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: The Tehreek-i-Tahaffuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP), a coalition of several opposition parties including the PTI, staged protests across the country against the 27th Amendment and "state oppression".

From Islamabad to Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi, protesters wearing black armbands chanted slogans for the "supremacy of the Constitution" and the release of incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan.

Speakers at several venues denounced the 26th and 27th constitutional amendments and recent changes to cybercrime laws, calling the moves an attempt to shield "powerful personalities" from accountability and tighten the establishment's grip on power. They also slammed the alleged manhandling of Mr Khan's sisters and lawmakers outside Adiala jail.

Authorities, meanwhile, responded with a heavy police presence and a wave of arrests, particularly in Sindh and Punjab, where opposition leaders claimed their protest campaign was being stifled through intimidation and detentions.

In Islamabad, the party organised a protest march outside the Faisal Mosque. Surrounded by police, the brief protest was led by Senator Allama Raja Nasir Abbas, Mehmood Khan Achakzai — nominated leader of the house in the National Assembly — Salman Akram Raja, Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar and other TTAP leaders.

Allama Abbas addressed the gathering and said their campaign was "for the people and the country".

"We will continue our struggle against the state oppression," he said, adding, "This government is a bunch of oppressors and usurpers."

He said the recent constitutional amendments, changes to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) and other measures being taken in the country, particularly by the Punjab government, amounted to "tyranny against the citizens of this country".

"We will never be bogged down and will continue peaceful countrywide agitation," he said in a fiery speech.

Protesters included TTAP workers, supporters of allied parties and lawyers, but witnesses said the workers initially failed to energise the crowd as police surrounded the gathering. At that point, Allama Nasir Abbas took centre stage, raised slogans and helped organise the crowd to begin the march.

'Lifetime immunity un-Islamic'

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the demonstrations were held on the directives of provincial PTI President MNA Junaid Akbar, following the TTAP's decision. The protests were organised at the district level, where charged PTI workers chanted slogans against state institutions and held portraits of Imran Khan.

In Peshawar, dozens of PTI workers held their protest outside the city's press club. It was addressed by Provincial Minister for Local Government Meena Khan Afridi, MNA Sher Ali Arbab and PTI Peshawar district President Irfan Saleem.

In his speech, Mr Afridi said their incarcerated leader, Imran Khan, had presented two options to the TTAP leadership. The first option, he said, was to hold negotiations with "the powers that be" to sort out all outstanding issues. If talks failed, the second option was a peaceful countrywide protest.

He said granting lifetime immunity to certain people through the

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FCC sets up special desk, receives two fresh cases

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan (FCCP) on Friday received the first-ever appeal against a Sindh High Court (SHC) decision after a dedicated Filing and Information Desk was formally opened.

FCCP Registrar Muhammad Hafeezullah Khan inaugurated the desk on the premises of the Islamabad High Court (IHC). "The establishment of this desk marks a significant step toward enhancing public facilitation and improving access to judicial services," says a handout issued by FCCP.

NCHR moves court to get manual sewer cleaning phased out: Page 4

At the inauguration, the desk received two fresh cases, marking the commencement of its operational functions.

The desk has been established to serve multiple purposes, including filing of new cases for FCCP, providing information and assistance to litigants, lawyers and the general public and receiving applications for attested copies of judicial records.

Before the setting up of the information desk, the lawyers were facing difficulty since they had no idea where to file petitions or appeals.

Justice Ali Baqar Najafi,

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Faisalabad glue factory explosion claims 20 lives

• Factory owner, staff held • Probe body formed on CM's directive • Labour unions blame govt

By Tariq Saeed

TOBA TEK SINGH: Twenty people, including seven members of the same family, lost their lives and seven others were injured in a massive steamer explosion apparently due to gas leak at a glue factory in Faisalabad on early Friday morning.

The explosion at the Crystal Chemical Factory also destroyed four neighbouring industrial units and nine houses in the Malikpur locality of Faisalabad.

Rescue workers and police shifted the deceased and the injured, including three critically injured, to the burn unit of Allied Hospital. The victims aged between one year and 62 years, according to officials.

Unsafe labour: Editorial on Page 6

RESCUERS search for survivors after an explosion at a chemical factory.—Courtesy Rescue 1122

In the meantime, the crime-scene unit and forensic unit of police collected evidence from the site, while the factory owner, Qaiser Chughtai, along with administrative staff allegedly went into hiding for some time.

While expressing grief over the loss of lives, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif extended condolences to the bereaved families and sought a report on the incident from Commissioner Raja Jahangir Anwar. Subsequently, the commissioner formed a five-member inquiry committee and sought a report to determine responsibility for the incident.

Govt negligence blamed

National Trade Union Federation Secretary-General Nasir Mansoor, Labour Qaumi Movement Chairman Baba Latif Ansari, and Haqooq-i-Khalq Party Chief Farooq Tariq, in separate statements, blamed the government

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'Two commanders' among 13 terrorists killed in KP

Seven killed, two injured in attack on Bannu peace committee members

By Ghulam Mursalin Marwat

LAKKI MARWAT: At least 13 terrorists linked to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), were killed in two separate intelligence-based operations , the military's media wing said in a statement on Friday.

"Troops effectively engaged the khawarij location and after an intense fire exchange, ten khawarij were sent to hell," an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) statement issued after the Lakki Marwat and Dera Ismail Khan operations read.

Fitna-al-Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the TTP.

However, a local police official provided a more detailed account of Lakki Marwat operation.

According to the official, security officials acted on credible information about a group of terrorists moving toward the Paharkhel Pacca area from the Bettani subdivision.

He said security forces launched the operation early in the morning, targeting militant hideouts.

"An intense exchange of took place between the security personnel and terrorists," the official said, adding that police, supported by armoured personnel carriers, also participated. "During the operation, tenterrorists were neutralised while five terrorists were injured."

The police official identified two of the dead as commanders of the Tipugul group, Niaz Ali, known as Akasha, and Abdullah, alias Shponkai.

The official also noted that one facilitator for the group was arrested.

Meanwhile, in a separate IBO conducted in Dera Ismail Khan district, three terrorists were killed by security forces, according to ISPR.

"Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from [the] killed Indian-sponsored khawarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces, law enforcement agencies and target killing of innocent civilians," the military's media

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Trade, power plans linked to Kabul ending terror support

• FO says Islamabad understands 'economic pain' caused by closures but security threat 'existential' • Can't let 'our people be killed indiscriminately' • Scheduling of planned Turkish delegation's visit in connection with Pak-Afghan conflict still awaited

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Friday said that the resumption of trade with Afghanistan depended on the Taliban regime ending cross-border terrorism, and also linked the fate of key regional energy projects to Kabul halting its support for terrorist groups.

"The onus of delay in the reopening of the border crossings rests with the Afghan Taliban regime," Foreign Office (FO) spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi said at a weekly media briefing.

Pakistan and Afghanistan's bilateral trade, estimated at $1.6 billion to $1.8bn in 2023-24, with key border gateways like Torkham and Chaman handling most of the traffic, has been suspended since mid-October, following deadly clashes between Pakistani forces and Taliban fighters.

This suspension is estimated to be costing Afghan traders an estimated $2.5 million a day.

The impasse has pushed Kabul to increasingly rely on Iranian routes, including Chabahar, while risking the erosion of Pakistan's roughly $1bn in annual transit fees in addition to its own trade losses.

Mr Andrabi said Pakistan had closed border crossings and suspended all trade because of "the support being extended to Fitna-al-Khawarij [FAK] and Fitna-al-Hindustan [FAH] terrorist elements by the Afghan Taliban regime".

FAK is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, while the Balochistan Liberation Army and other militant groups based in the province have been designated FAH to highlight India's alleged role in terrorism and destabilisation across Pakistan.

'Economic pain'

The FO spokesperson said Islamabad understood the economic pain caused by the closures but described the security threat as "existential".

"If you recall, on November 10 and 15, the trade posts were actually attacked from Afghanistan. So, either we get ourselves killed, or we undertake a very risky trade. What is the choice?" he added.

"Carrying out trade has become risky. So, with respect to trade, the position remains the same as I outlined last week."

Mr Andrabi said Islamabad had for years attempted to insulate trade from security tensions but that patience had run out.

"From 2022, 23, 24 and the mid of 25, we segregated trade and security. But then there is a threshold of patience. I think that threshold of patience has been crossed," he continued.

The FO spokesperson noted that Islamabad could not allow trade to continue as if it were a "licence to kill Pakistanis from Afghan soil".

He rejected suggestions that trade losses should override security concerns. "Can you put a price tag on a human life, a Pakistani life?" he said.

"Consider the people whose father, children, mother have been killed in these terrorist attacks. Can we convince them that look, let these killings continue because we are having an X amount of dollars of trade with Afghanistan?"

Regional projects

He also warned that major regional infrastructure projects including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) depended on a shift in the Taliban's conduct.

"The success of all these projects also depends on the Taliban regime halting its support and abetment of terrorist outfits operating from Afghan

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ON OTHER PAGES

Crypto used to move $600m illegally

The country has lost an estimated $600 million to illegal crypto transactions, a development that has reduced the flow of dollars into the banking system. Exchange Companies Association's Malik Bostan said people buying dollars from exchange companies are depositing them in their foreign currency accounts, from where they withdraw the dollars and purchase cryptocurrencies through illegal means. **Page 9**

Troops to be deployed for by-polls

The interior ministry on Friday approved the deployment of the Pakistan Army and civil armed forces for security in 13 National and provincial assembly constituencies, where by-elections are scheduled to take place on Sunday (tomorrow). A notification issued by the interior ministry said the approval followed requests from Election Commission of Pakistan. **Page 12**

Plus...

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